

## **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

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July 11 - August 20, 1996

Newspaper coverage of the Work Group's first meeting included a reference to a designated e-mail address for public comment -**comment@dis.wa.gov**

Between July 11 and August 20, 1996, twenty-five people used the e-mail address to comment on matters of concern to them. One writer preferred conventional mail. Copies of the full text of all public comment has been distributed to all members. The following high level summary is provided as a courtesy.

### **Government:**

A number of writers reminded the work group that government has greater access to people's lives than do private sector interests. Government is trusted with personal information -- and the writers' expectations are that personally identifiable information would be handled in a way that would not break that trust.

One comment seems prophetic in light of subsequent developments in Oregon, "I shudder to think what might happen if for example the Department of Motor Vehicles made available their database of car registrations and licensed drivers."

### **Business:**

Many writers keyed on the fact that government information represents "a rich resource for business." A number of writers also pointed out the need for safeguards in the event that not all business interests were responsible in their use of that data.

Writers opposed having business interests "invade" their lives through the misuse of public records through unsolicited, tightly targeted direct advertising.

A number of writers didn't want taxpayer dollars supporting a company's marketing plan -- or supporting one private-sector competitor over another.

### **Privacy:**

As expected, privacy was a recurring theme in the comments. Many expressed the fear of becoming the victim of crime -- credit card fraud, employment and insurance discrimination.

The concerns also extended to violent crime -- personally identifiable information misused in cases of stalking and domestic violence.

As one writer put it, "The simple fact is that there are a lot of us out here hiding from someone who wishes to do us harm."

Computerization and digitization brought with it the need for more safeguards and the need to "fight harder" to protect personally identifiable information. Some writers cited what they viewed as a lack of enforcement and a lack of recourse in the case of violations.

### **Solutions:**

Some writers offered solutions to the problems they identified.

The proposed solutions ranged from a call to abolish all exemptions to the prohibition on selling of lists of individuals -- to a recommendation to sell data only in aggregate form with personally ID masked -- to a suggestion for a standing oversight committee which would provide accountability for the release of public records.

A number of writers asked for a widely available process through which people can request that personally identifiable information about them not be released. Others called it an "opt-out" option -- or a check-off box in a form -- with a view to balance the protection of personally identifiable data with the legitimate planning purposes to which the information is put.

### **A Note on Process:**

The Governor's Office issued a press release late last week announcing the web site and we are again seeing an increase in responses which had eased off following the initial flurry.

The inboxes remain open. Those who have written have been invited to comment on the ongoing work of the group. Others are similarly welcome to become part of this process.

### **Contacting the Work Group:**

The address through which the Work Group may be contacted follows:

<b>Mail:</b>	Governor's Work Group P.O. Box 42445 Olympia, WA 98504-2445
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:comment@dis.wa.gov">comment@dis.wa.gov</a>
<b>Web:</b>	<a href="http://www.wa.gov/dis/comaccess">http://www.wa.gov/dis/comaccess</a>

